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ABSTRACT

Graduate education in the United States is viewed as a narrowing and intellectually confining experience, and its effects on the student and society are discussed. The experience of the graduate student includes learning how to deal with departmental requirements, course expectations, and demands from professors. The ability to "hustle" to meet the requirements of the program is an important skill and is seen as a form of academic socialization found in every discipline. Rather than developing an inquisitive mind, unafraid to delve into various fields and raise important questions, graduate schools force students to function within a particular paradigm producing graduates with shallow vision and limited credentials. Training received in graduate school, the skills required to "hustle," are then put into practice in the professional world and the result is a group of power-seeking people of action and little depth. Professors also partake in the academic "hustle" in order to attract students and to publish papers and books. Students, professors, and people in general are seen as victims of a technological society that demands a supply of bureaucrats, politicians, business and technical persons to keep the system running, and provides few rewards for the reflective intellectual who is not willing to play along. (BH)

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Graduate School: Pursuit of Truth or Delicate Hustle?

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Graduate School: Pursuit of Truth or
Delicate Hustle?

Graduate students quickly learn that their survival depends on the ability to hustle through a mzae of requirements. Demands come in the form of: departmental requirements, course expectations, and ultimatums from major professors. For many students it seems there is little time to reflect while rushing to meet these requirements. Most graduate schools screen their students for a certain level of academic aptitude; but beyond this, the ability to hustle is most important. This ability may be considered a form of motivation, an intangible characteristic that is difficult to describe and measure.

In many respects, graduate students become intellectually confined while fulfilling scholarly requirements to become legitimate experts in their field. After being recognized as an expert, the graduate is ready to see that others do as they have done--conform to standards. This process is a type of academic socialization that is practiced to some degree in every discipline. Historians speak the truisms of a particular orientation: a revisionist language, a social language or a diplomatic language. Psychologists understand the language of behavioralism, operant reinforcement, Freud, Lewin, Jung and Rogers. Political scientists learn to talk about systems models, theories of pluralism, elitism, Thomas Hobbs, Machiavelli and Herbert Marcuse. Each discipline has its own language supported by the writings of their adopted academic gurus and intellectual heros. This process is capable of producing people that are narrow and rigid; students learn to conform to their professors' ideology and continue to perpetuate the rituals of academic passage.

It is also true that within disciplines there are serious differences regarding the pursuit of knowledge. The intellectual or social historian is

often in conflict with the conservative, southern historian. The humanistic psychologist cannot tolerate Skinner's cure for society. The conflict sociologist is not able to accept theories of the functionalist. There are serious differences concerning the exercise of truth, a high but uncertain calling. The fragmentation of a science into "schools" is not unknown even in a rigorous discipline such as mathematics.[1]

Students write papers and study to support a particular view of the world. Their ontological plane is constantly reinforced and supported by their major professors and peers. It may be considered heresy to venture into other disciplines. A certain snobbishness develops which views other disciplines as unworthy for study or consideration. Physical scientists may look down their noses at social scientists and vice versa. Medical doctors are sometimes discreetly haughty toward non-medical doctorates. This process of academic socialization is practiced in every department to some extent. Professors guide their students into courses that support a particular view of the world. It also happens that professors acknowledge their close friends and academic associates as worthy scholars and ignore those who differ in ideology. Intellectual ethnocentrism develops.

In order for students to function in the academic world, they must be quite flexible. Students learn to reinforce their professors' views in subtle, implicit ways. They learn to keep quiet and look pensive while allowing their professors to feed them knowledge. If a student does not conform well, then subtle punishment is administered. Albert Einstein was not given recommendations by some professors when he finished his graduate studies, because he was an outspoken student. He asked many questions, and too often he spoke his mind. Einstein was lucky to find work as a civil servant when he graduated.[2]

Graduate schools force students to organize themselves and meet vigorous demands. There is constant pressure to complete requirements and move on to other projects. They must hustle in a subtle, delicate way. This system does produce people who are able to speak and write, but they often function within a particular paradigm. Montaigne said that anyone who wants to be cured of ignorance must confess it.[3] Graduate schools frequently produce polite, egotistical, self-centered, pedantic persons unwilling to admit that they may not possess the truth.

An inbreeding of pedantic persons can be dangerous. Production is forced into narrow channels by rigid people. Certainly researchers and scholars are needed, but their efforts should be moderated with an understanding of the world and human nature. The Chinese Communists require all students in the upper primary grades and in the middle schools to spend three weeks each year working on farms, three weeks in factories and three weeks in the army. "This work experience is planned to contribute to these educational objectives: a) developing respect and appreciation for the contributions of work to the society; b) developing an appreciation for and good social solidarity with the proletariat; c) developing an understanding of the organization of work in these three settings; d) inculcating the habit of daily work; and e) obtaining the satisfaction of 'serving the people'."[4] This assignment during the early education of students may help to instill a respect for hard work, and it may also help the student to understand human nature. It is difficult for a hustler to practice his subtle skills while doing hard work. Eric Hoffer tells us that some of his best thoughts have come while doing manual labor.[5] Albert Schweitzer wrote scholarly theology books while working under difficult conditions in Africa.[6] Hoffer and Schweitzer have lived humble but productive lives and provide us with good models to follow.

Academic people are often condescending when using terms such as: the masses, the working class or the proletariat to describe people who work with their hands. Such a haughty attitude is not becoming to our educated elite. It is ironic that the shrewd hustler can be contemptuous of a simple laborer.

Are we producing thinkers of the first order or people with shallow vision and limited credentials? Some of our best political writers and thinkers were individuals with many skills; Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were industrious but enlightened men. These people were serious scholars. In the last 50 years our bureaucratic efficiency and vast technological knowledge have not produced many thoughtful people on the national level. We have Johnsons and Nixons, crude, power-seeking men of action and little depth. Scholars on the "make" have sold themselves to the Johnsons and Nixons to gain influence and power. An image of Henry Kissinger fighting for power and recognition is the epitome of academic arrogance. Our society pays homage to the hustler, and our graduate schools tend to produce these people. The so-called best schools produce cosmopolitan types.

It should not be difficult to understand how the hustling graduate student with talent can become influential. This person knows how the hustle works and uses knowledge to gain favor. Understanding how to get the Ph.D. is excellent training for using people to secure a place in society. The ability to hustle through the graduate degree provides insight as to how one might hustle the public. Since the public tends to be more gullible than scholars, it is much easier to pawn off reworked, clever ideas. A good bit of what we take for innovation is a sham. Educational entrepreneurs flood us with literature that is lacking in depth and understanding. Another offensive tactic is to write in the jargon of the discipline, so that few can understand what is being communicated. Statistical treatments can also mask ignorance while

being quite impressive to the naive. Ideas are thrown about, and clichés are used. Catchy words become popular; expertise, accountability, competency testing and human resources development are a few trite examples. J. Alexander Gunn said, "Clarity does not mean shallowness but rather the reverse, because it is due to keen perceptive power, to a seeing further into the heart of things, involving an intimate contact with reality."[7]

Playing the hustle is learned as soon as students start elementary school, and it becomes ever so subtle as they progress in education. Graduate students are experts--perfectionists at the game. It is a fact that some academic advisors inform their incompetent students as to where they may go to solicit someone to take the Graduate Record Examinations for them. The hustle is promoted by insiders.

Professors at all levels understand academic hustle, because they are actively involved. Students must be courted to fill classes, secure grants and provide for employment. Without students the education business is busted. In addition to being a part of schemes to acquire students, professors must hustle to turn out papers, books and other scholarly trappings. It is amazing to watch the public absorb the writings of the pseudo-intellectuals and embrace their utterings as truth. People have become eminent authorities by communicating with stylish, hollow erudition.

Our society functions as a technocratic community bound together in an effort to gain material goods and the good life. We depend on technologies to tell us what is needed. There has developed a clique composed of highly skilled bureaucrats, politicians, business people and technical persons who depend on bright graduate students to keep the system hustling. The CIA, for instance, recruits particularly bright people from good schools for clandestine work. The legal profession was over represented among the

defendants in the Watergate scandle, ambitious hustlers who would stop at nothing to gain power and influence.

One may speculate how we have come to produce so many hustlers and so few thinkers with impact. Perhaps there are people of high standards with reflective natures around. Society does not provide much in the way of rewards to reflective persons. Universities and colleges need these people, but their writings and thoughts usually do not penetrate the banal, lockstep, hustling mind. A look at our entertainment centers, television programming, popular magazines and sports mania provides one with some idea of the American taste. A literate person can become lost and swallowed in a mire of trite simplicity. Three-hundred years ago, when there was no technocratic society, we find philosophers like Descartes interested in science. While Descartes was founding modern philosophy, he also helped give the world analytic geometry. Our twentieth century scientists often do not concern themselves with difficult, philosophical or political questions. Like the bureaucrat, scientists can function in a self-perpetuating, mindless vacuum. Wernher Von Braun could be comfortable building destructive rockets for Adolf Hitler's Nazis or putting men on the moon for the United States. Technical skills are related to power, and power seems to be our goal. World power through economic and military strength is a reflection of the plutocrats' priorities. These priorities are sifted down to the public. Hustlers understand the power game and play with a pugnacious zeal. Hoffer said that a major problem for this country will be to channel the energies of the intellectual to worthwhile causes.[8]

A whirlpool is created by graduate schools that hustle well. Massachusetts Institute of Technology is dependent on federal funds to function. Could it be that MIT might compromise on scholarship for the sake of

grantsmanship? Are serious questions raised concerning the government's motives prior to accepting money to conduct research? Universities are proud of their graduate research programs; in fact, they brag and strut when explaining the quantity of funds obtained from the government. It is a fact that many people believe the more federal dollars received, the more prestigious a institution becomes. Grantsmen are needed to follow government bureaucrats and politicans like bloodhounds sniffing out their pray. Graduate students are taught the rituals of government funded research and are encouraged to play the game as best they can, no holds bared. The hustle and con are conducted at the highest levels within educational institutions. Who would dare question the input of millions to inflate salaries, create assistantships and conduct the business of research--the pursuit of truth with glory? Professors often gloat about their ingenious schemes to bilk the government of research funds.

Those academics who raise questions and do not get a share of the research funds are considered to be fossils, relics without a future. Scholars content to write and speak their mind are often bypassed by ambitious administrators. Rewards are handed down to the diligent, obedient hustler. Those who speak out are indulged and then ignored for the most part. Hoffer quotes Wildavsky in summarizing some of our recent social unrest: "Middle-class civil servants hired upper-class student radicals to use lower-class Negroes as a battering-ram against the existing local political system."[9] Are intellectual dupes being produced by our universities? How do honest scholars exist?

Large institutions of higher education are often administered by people who crave power and recognition. These people have paid their academic dues in the currency of some intellectual endeavor and are now interested in perpetuating a system of bigness with a hackneyed style. Many are intellectual frauds who often speak the language acceptable to the public. "A great and growing university." Growing how and great for what purpose?

Maurice Zeitlin has given us some warnings about the connections between economic and political forces; this entire system is feed from our institutions of higher education.[10] The hustle is learned and then played out on the field--boardrooms, fancy office complexes, and in the White House. "Moreover, the language of skid row or prison is not substantially different from the language one hears in a bankers' club or even in the White House."[11] The players frequently come from prestigious schools, and they are thought to be reputable people. They bring to the game a most sophisticated form of the hustle. They are able to disavow wrong doing in the face of condeming evidence. It involves weaving an intricate pattern of contorted logic that is self-serving and deceiving. They learned their lessons well in our hallowed, academic halls.

Our public palces are invaded by drab conversation and avant-garde movements. These movements attract people who are looking for peace of mind in a society that seeks to stimulate and excite us. The leaders of these movements are college graduates, with highfalutin degrees. They are interested in making money by explaining the complicated in simplistic terms. "I'm O.K. You're O.K." is a mass therapy for the "true believer." The legerdemain of psychology has produced some modern witch doctors. These strange mountebanks have become most prolific in our affluent, troubled society.[12]

Hustle is the oldest game that is now being played on a grand scale. We see more intellectual hucksters in this post-industrial age. They are all around us in different forms. Political, social, business, religious and educational hustlers thrive on confussion within society. "You go along to get along" is the credo of a twentieth century slave. These slaves are products of technological and political chaos. They are taught to hustle in and out of society's numerous, revolving doors and to keep their thoughts to

themselves--meek "yes" people. There is no substance to their being; they are not real on the stage--merely puppets being manipulated by their own inertia. It is sad.

FOOTNOTES

1. Abraham Kaplan, The Conduct of Inquiry (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler Publishing Company, 1964).

2. Ronald W. Clark, Einstein: The Life and Times. (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1971).

3. Michel Eyquen de Montaigne, The Complete Essays of Montaigne. Translated by Donald M. Frame. (Stanford, California: Standord University Press, 1957).

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5. Eric Hoffer, In Our Time (New York: William Marrow and Company, 1977).

6. George Marshall and David Poling, Schweitzer (New York: Pillar Books, 1971).

7. J. Alexander Gunn, Modern French Philosophy (London: ~~Adelphi Terrace~~ T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD., 1922) p. 322.

8. Hoffer.

9. Aaron Wildavsky quoted in In Our Time by Eric Hoffer (New York: William Marrow and Company, 1977).

10. Maurice Zeiltin, "Who Owns America?" The Progressive, 42 (June, 1978) and American Society, Inc. ed. by Maurice Zeitlin (Cnicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970).

11. Hoffer, p. 95.

12. Kurt W. Back, Beyond Words (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1972).